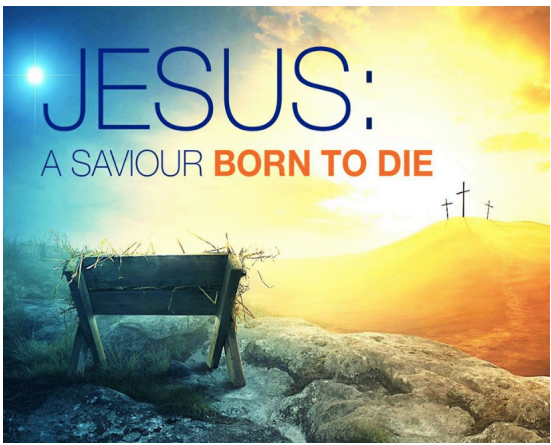


Gospel of Matthew

20:17~27

The Cup

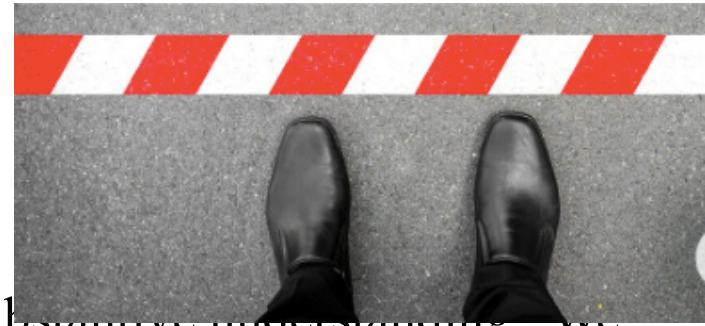




It is interesting that as we get close to the Christmas holiday, when we celebrate the birth of the Word of God, that we should, today, land on this particular passage in our journey through Matthew! It begins with Christ's pronouncement, a prophecy of His upcoming arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection! It is brief, but pretty detailed. It reminds us, one week before we celebrate the birth of the Christ-child, that the baby was sent to earth on a great mission – a mission that would culminate in the simultaneous taking/giving of His life. In brief, He came to die! Of course, we all are born, live and die, but we hope for a long and healthy existence on this earth before we die. We are not born into a plan where we are chosen to be executed

horribly when we are in our prime,.. not like Jesus was! Tragically, some do die in their prime – mishap, war, disease, murder,.. but **not** if they *could* have chosen not to, like Jesus could have – but didn't! He obviously knew exactly what He was facing in the not-too-distant future. In His humanity, it appears that He flinched in the Gethsemane, but in His divinity, "*Father do I really have to do this? Is there not any other way?*" But,.. he recovered to finish His terrible/wonderful mission of self-sacrifice – dying in our place, so that you and I might live, and not just live but live eternally! Now, if you have questions (and I hope you do) about the seeming injustice of an eternal existence in Hell, I share your concerns. It is the hardest thing for me to accept about Christianity – a horrible and vastly hard truth! But we can't just change reality because we don't like it! People are doing that these days, but not legitimately! We can't change an absolute truth just by imagining it is not true! The one thing I cling to as a Christian, however, is the fact that Jesus was born to die! And I cling to the fact that He came so that people can live and live full and rewarding lives in a fallen world, and then continue living eternally with God in an unimaginably glorious hereafter! But Jesus came to be our escape hatch, our door/our entrance into a glorious future, rather than the alternative - the nightmare scenario of Hell! I choose to focus on God's provision of heaven! I know these dark questions about eternal Hell remain out there, but I cannot solve them. I don't know enough to know why Hell must exist as it does, but I do know enough to trust God with my extreme discomfort regarding Hell. He must hate Hell too, since He sent His Son to die in our place so that we don't have to go there!

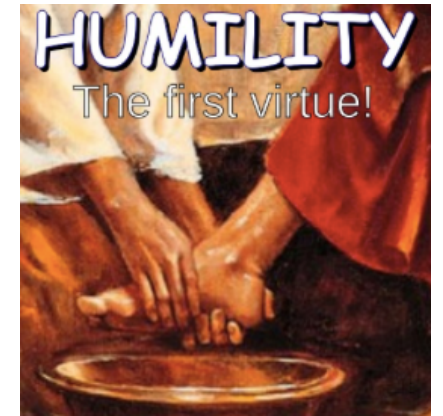
But in vs 17-19, Jesus reveals the sequence of God's plan once again, although the disciples do not get it! They never did get it as long as Jesus was with them even though He did this a number of times! It took the trauma of the cross to knock their assumptions out from underneath them so they could start over and figure out what Jesus had actually said to them! We have assumptions too, although, that's the thing about assumptions – we don't know we have assumptions. Assumptions masquerade as facts when they are, in fact, only assumptions. Sometimes assumptions are factual, based on uncontested evidence, but often, maybe more often than not, they are not, and they hold us back from real and substantive understanding. We assume we know things about God that, I suspect, are not true, or not always true, and the actual truth might blow our minds! But like the disciples, our minds just don't go there even when it is right in front of our eyes... but that is especially so when it isn't revealed to us in any clear way by Jesus. It will not surprise me in the least that heaven will be FULL of surprises – corrections to our perception of reality, even as Bible-believing Christians! We have truth as we can discern it in the scriptures, and much of it is plain, but there is much that we either misinterpret or simply do not have the capacity to see (grasp) and hear (understand/interpret correctly)! To think that we are different than these disciples is a mistake! For instance, I believe Hell is a terrible place eternally reserved for those immortal souls that have rejected Christ! By rejecting Christ, these souls continue to be responsible for paying for their own sins - and Hell is the price of that! It is an unthinkable terrible price! I mean, if we somehow could contemplate Hell, we would go mad... crazy! But the thing about it is that through faith and trust in Christ and His hard, HARD, mission, NO ONE has to go to Hell to pay for the sin of withholding themselves from God! Now – that is what I believe the scriptures teach. I know I have the right of it! But I hope I have Hell wrong, at least the eternal part of it, and maybe the fire. I can't think of anything more painful than fire! How that is compatible with darkness, I don't know. Because Jesus, in one place, describes Hell as a place of darkness and gnashing of teeth! So I hope there is something I'm not seeing here. I don't like hell, but I believe it exists. But Hell, the way I understand it, being terrible in ways that are beyond human comprehension, certainly adds urgency to the concept of the human need for salvation through Jesus! It certainly add urgency to our mission to cooperate with Jesus in seeking and saving the lost!



So in the next section, we have this issue of supremacy come up again. I can only surmise that this comes up again because the disciples are not getting this issue. They still expect that they will be rewarded for giving up everything to follow Jesus by being rewarded with supremacy! But Jesus has made it clear on many occasions that they will not be –

 **SUPREMACY**

Vs.

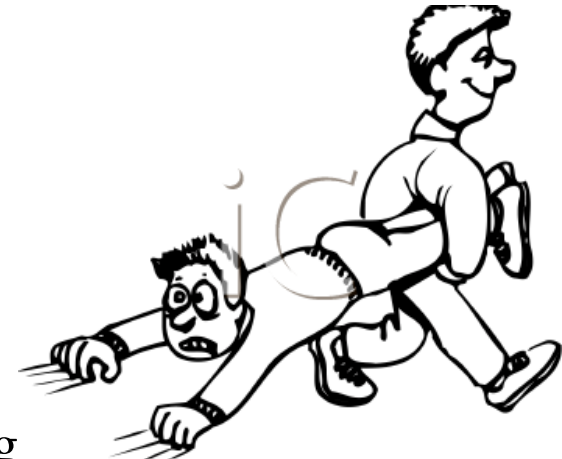


at least not in *this* life! The desire/drive for supremacy is for the world, not the Kingdom of God! Within the Kingdom of God, those that strive for supremacy still haven't gotten the Gospel memo that Jesus kept putting out there for His disciples. The power-hungry are church leaders that are doomed to exposure, and to fall from great heights! They are cult-of-personality leaders that want power and control over others for their own ego and for their own gain! This un-Christlike desire will lead them to use and abuse others.

So, Salome, the mother of the brothers, James and John, key disciples among the 12, comes to Jesus with her two adult sons, an action in itself that seems very overtly manipulative. I don't know if this is the idea of James and John, or if it is the idea of their mother. She wants supremacy for her sons. Supremacy for her sons means supremacy (by association) for herself! Such a position for her sons would give her the power of a princess of sorts. So she kneels and asks Jesus “*for a favor*”, that her sons may sit on His right and left when He assumes power on the throne of Judea and then the world! It is just a little request! The brothers should have been *SO* embarrassed, but they actually seem to be in on the ploy! Somehow someone overhears and gossips to the other disciples, who are severely offended, and rightly so! In the meantime Jesus tells this mother and her two sons that it is not up to Him to grant what they ask. That is God the Father's right! And He asks if they can “*drink my cup*”? The two obviously have no idea what he is asking, but they are sure that they can drink that cup Jesus is asking about. They assume that He is talking about the cup of power! He is not. So, what “*cup*” is Jesus talking about?! [Matt. 26:39 / Jn. 18:11]

Once again I must take us back to **Ph'p 2:2-11**, where the life and ministry of Jesus is summarized in a creedal-type statement from Paul.

Humility is absolutely necessary in the government of God's Kingdom! Without it we will be ceaselessly embroiled in power-struggles between leaders and between laymen. Jesus needs leaders whose sole purpose is to lift HIM up , not themselves. Paul was a good example of this - **[1 Cor. 3:3-9]**. People were making the mistake of following those apostles or leaders in the church that had originally brought them to Christ. Paul says here that it doesn't matter who brought you to Christ, and that it is every Christian's duty to follow **Christ**, not the one that brought you to Christ, because that person was only serving Christ! It is appropriate to be forever thankful to someone that has brought you along to the point of faith in Christ, but not appropriate to become their disciple! We have one Master/Lord, and that is Jesus! True disciple-makers encourage people to become fruit-bearing followers of *Jesus*, not of themselves. Like John the Baptist said – “***He must increase and I must decrease***”! Disciple-makers have no power in themselves to change people's hearts and lives except in superficial ways. The real and substantive change comes in relation to our love and loyalty to Christ and whether He is supreme on one's life! Only He is the Creator of both the first and second creations! No man has power to recreate another person and to reform them into productive, fruit-bearing Christians. A true makeover of the heart is a miracle of God, a powerful work of the Holy Spirit, and only He can do it! When we miss that, as a great many well-meaning Christians do, we are in for some major disappointment! We will work, and then out of frustration work harder, only to see and feel the disappointment of diminishing results! It happens all the time! We try to play Holy Spirit ourselves, dragging people along in God's Kingdom, practically kicking and screaming until passive-aggressive resistance kicks in, or even outright rebellion! We try to carry them along in their faith by force of our own personality and will,.. and the rule of God in God's Kingdom just doesn't work that way!



No! Every Christian is obligated by the love of the Living Christ to follow Jesus, to love Him by obeying Him (Jesus said that), to rely and depend upon His Spirit for power and transformation - power to defeat habitual sin, power to love genuinely love people, and power for courage and persistence in bringing people to Jesus! In other words I can bring you to Jesus, but you have to pursue and follow Him. I am to assist you, yes, but I can't make you follow Jesus! It is ultimately up to you to keep in step with the Spirit - to pursue Christ and His purposes out of love and devotion to Him, and not out of obligation to me or anyone else, this church or any other church, or to a set of rules, or a love of a lifestyle, or because the values of Christ resonate with you! No! It is about the person of God, interacting with Him, listening to Him - joyfully, and with a grateful heart, surrendering to Him daily, submitting and obeying in *ALL* things (not just a few)! And it is good because it is right, and the right thing is always satisfying! But rarely is it easy - not when we are talking about losing your own ego in the shadow of Christ's larger one, and your ambitions to His more significant ambitions for you! In fact, it can be *so not* easy that it is downright impossible! Yet nothing is impossible with God! He just wants us to let go and trust Him and obey Him when we think we can't, and HE will make it possible! And that is how this life of God works. It is miraculous, a cooperative effort with the God who makes all things possible! And we end up being a recreated act of God or "*a new creature*" (2 Cor. 5:17)! We end up living "*life to the full*" (Jn. 10:10). There is no other way to substantially break the mold of our old life and start new. You would think that a person could, but we indeed can't! Re-creation only happens when God does it - when He engages His Spirit, and there is POWER for the process of transformation (John 14:23 / *Eph. 1:18-20)! **Rom. 8:5-17]**



Now, this is important to understand! When the Spirit of God takes over a person's life, that person is humbled by God! Not because God necessarily beats them down, (although He will do that if He has to), but because He changes their heart, their ego, their essential self! We are free then to serve others rather than just serve ourselves! The person that serves God by serving others is a person that has drunk the cup of Christ! They no longer are obsessed with just their own concerns, and their own supremacy, but also with the needs and concerns of others (Paul, describing Timothy)

